

Whereas, Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson were born into a family of talented musicians, including their fathers John Arch Thompson and Walter Thompson and their grandfather, Bob Thompson, all of whom learned and continued the musical techniques passed down by their ancestors; and

Whereas, without any formal lessons, Joe Thompson began playing the fiddle at the age of five and soon joined his father and other family members in playing music at square dances and frolics for both white and black audiences in their rural northern Orange County community; and

Whereas, during the 1930s and 1940s, Joe Thompson, along with his brother, Nathaniel Thompson, and his cousin, Odell Thompson, both on banjo, performed as a traditional fiddle and banjo ensemble for various social events; and

Whereas, Joe Thompson was not only a talented fiddle player but also a gifted singer and square dance caller; and

Whereas, during World War II, Joe Thompson served in the United States Army from 1942 to 1945 and, upon his return to the United States, found that his style of music was no longer popular; and

Whereas, Joe Thompson later moved to Mebane, North Carolina, and provided for his family by working for a local furniture company for more than 35 years; and

Whereas, Odell Thompson settled in Alamance County with his family and worked for a local mattress company for 20 years; and

Whereas, during the early 1970s, Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson were encouraged to resume performing and found new audiences eager to hear them play; and

Whereas, Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson played at family gatherings and performed for radio and television audiences; and

Whereas, Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson became well known for their music and were featured at the National Folk Life Festival in Washington, DC, the National Folk Festival in Lowell, Massachusetts, Festival of American Fiddle Tunes in Port Townsend, Washington, and the International Music Festival in Brisbane, Australia; and

Whereas, Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson also performed at Carnegie Hall and participated in various workshops and conferences; and

Whereas, Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson received numerous honors, including the Brown-Hudson Award from the North Carolina Folklore Society, the North Carolina Heritage Award, and the Folk Heritage Award from the National Endowment for the Arts; and

Whereas, Joe Thompson was named one of the 12 recipients of the 2007 National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellowships, the nation's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts; and

Whereas, Joe Thompson and Odell Thompson thrilled audiences worldwide until Odell's death in 1994; and

Whereas, Joe Thompson has continued to play the fiddle, teaching at international fiddle and banjo conventions and mentoring a new generation of African-American string band musicians; and

Whereas, at the age of 88, Joe Thompson is considered by many to be the oldest if not the last African-American fiddler in North Carolina; and